

**Testimony  
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**Hearing on Sustainability and the Food Service Industry  
The House Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming  
February 26, 2008**

Thank you very much for the opportunity to testify about the essential role of the food service industry in sustainability and the strategic value of sustainability to guide food service innovation. I am the Chief Sustainability Officer for the University of New Hampshire where for the last 10 years I have directed the University Office of Sustainability, the first endowed, university-wide program of its kind in the country. The University of New Hampshire is a Land, Sea and Space Grant university that is building a culture of sustainability by organizing everything we do around its principles; our curriculum, operations, research, and engagement with the wider world are all impacted by this commitment. Building a sustainable food system is fundamental to this broad mission.

Based on our work at UNH, there are four principles I would like to share with you that we have found to be important in building a sustainable food service:

1. A comprehensive approach to food system sustainability must address the important role played by the food service industry and I applaud your actions here today to do just that. The food service industry is an increasingly important actor in the chain that links agriculture, the environment and public health. In addition to minimizing their own direct operational impacts, sustainability practices within the food service industry can create more stable and greater demand for sustainable agriculture from the local to the global level while providing healthy, delicious cuisine that nourishes the palate and spirit. This means that sustainable food system advocates from all sectors must engage the food service industry in these broader efforts.

2. A comprehensive approach to building a sustainable food service industry must see that industry as part and parcel of the larger food system. A successful approach must go beyond “food counter to compost” as this hearing is entitled, to embrace the entire food system cycle from healthy soils to healthy farm and food enterprises to healthy communities including composting operations that in turn help build healthy soils and so the cycle continues. We can’t have truly a sustainable food service industry unless we have a sustainable food system from farm to fork to compost to food security and nutritional health. This means that sustainable food service advocates and enterprises need to actively engage with partners from agriculture, resource conservation and nutrition to add their unique and critical contribution to the larger shared goal.
  
3. A comprehensive approach to building a sustainable food industry and food system must, in turn, see the food system as an essential part of the communities and society in which it operates. In our communities, food, agriculture and nutrition are linked to climate and energy, biodiversity and ecosystems and to regional economies and livable wages. All of these factors interact to impact our public health and quality of life. This is the province of sustainable communities, and the larger goal of sustainable development. Within a given food service operation, sustainability means thinking up and down the supply chain and across the life cycle of its products and services. In other words, food service enterprises need to develop sustainable practices related not simply to food and composting, but also to energy, water, landscaping, transportation, aesthetics and community development.
  
4. Finally, in addition to incorporating sustainable practices into our food service industry, it is critically important that these practices are seen as an integral part of education and learning within a broader culture of sustainability. In higher education sustainable food practices must be complemented by curriculum, research and public engagement that strengthens sustainable food systems in our communities. By cultivating the capacity of students in all fields to advance

sustainability in their civic and professional lives, we can ensure that the goals of energy independence and climate stabilization benefit from and contribute to the equally important goals of food security and environmental and public health. Education is the key to empowering and inspiring the creative problem-solving that can truly sustain a high quality of life for all Americans.

Let me illustrate these principles with a specific food service example that captures many of these points. Currently we are developing a sustainable eatery, known as the UNH Dairy Bar, that is part of our dining services offerings. What makes it sustainable?

- The menu is built around local, regional and organic products that support our regional farm-food economy and sustainable agriculture. Offerings favor nutrient-dense over calorie-dense foods, which simply means that there are more vegetables, fruits, whole foods and fiber – there is no fried fat, but there are salads and local lean meats. The menu supports sound nutrition and healthy life styles for the community as well as a sense of place and seasonality that emphasizes fresh, flavorful and local cuisine.
- It is also sustainable because it is using compostable, corn-starch-based table ware, composted through a recycling infrastructure that communicates clearly where to put what and why. The table ware and food waste will contribute to the more than 100 tons of finished compost produced each year on our campus.
- The infrastructure also includes available energy star appliances and a vegetable steamer that is 40% more energy efficient than a standard unit, resulting in reduced greenhouse gas emissions and energy cost savings.

But its goal of sustainability goes beyond that. The on-campus setting is a nineteenth century Romanesque Revival train station. This is part of our architectural heritage as well as our history of transportation, that now includes renewed daily rail service between Boston and Portland, Maine on the Amtrak Downeaster. As a result of our Transportation Demand Management Policy, UNH is now the largest public transit

provider in the state. Ridership on the Downeaster has grown dramatically since the service was re-established in 2002, after having been canceled in 1968. UNH ridership alone accounts for approximately 2.4 million vehicle miles not traveled in automobiles each year. In addition to housing a sustainable eatery, the train station site has also become a transit hub that provides multi-modal alternatives to automobile travel to the campus and surrounding region.

The UNH Dairy Bar project is the result of an enlightened and innovative approach to food service by UNH's Dining program. Its success lies in the collaboration of faculty members and students from dietetics, nutritional science, hospitality management and agriculture, along with staff from Energy and Campus Development. It is also part of a larger university initiative that is helping to build sustainable food systems through innovative curriculum, research and engagement activities that include the first organic dairy research and teaching farm at a university in the country. We established our dairy in 2005 as a regional research and demonstration center for organic dairy farmers, farmers undergoing or considering transition to organic production, and students of sustainable agriculture. The key to the success of this project has been collaboration with private, non-profit and government sector partners who share the goal of building sustainable food systems and recognize that universities have their own unique contribution to make, including research and teaching that compliments our sustainable food service practices.

These and many related projects are themselves part of a larger sustainability undertaking that we call the Sustainable Learning Community: a university-wide program that focuses on empowering and inspiring all members of the community to engage their imaginations to meet the challenges and opportunities of sustainability. The approach is comprehensive in two critical ways: first, it encompasses the **C**urriculum, **O**perations, **R**esearch, and **E**ngagement (CORE) functions of university life; second, it focuses on building critical thinking and creative problem solving at the intersections of climate and energy, biodiversity and ecosystems, the food system and our western democratic culture. In practical terms this includes a landfill methane gas pipeline and cogeneration power plant that beginning next year will reduce our campus greenhouse gas emissions by 57% below 1990 levels. It will also save millions of dollars and enhance energy security over

the next two decades. In addition, it will be the focus of research and teaching in landfill science and engineering including carbon sequestration and beneficial use of recycled materials. When combined with many other innovative examples that span the science, technology and policy of sustainability we see the outlines of what a 21<sup>st</sup> century education must be if we are to meet the challenges of sustainable development.

What is common to all of these efforts is collaboration based on shared goals that are in everyone's interests. In support of a comprehensive approach to building sustainable food systems within the broader framework of sustainability, our experience suggests that the following approaches are important for developing a national legislative and policy framework that will facilitate the necessary collaboration across disciplines, sectors and political parties that will serve the public good:

### **1. Support Regional Approaches to Food and Agriculture**

Federal policy through the Farm Bill and other related legislation should reflect the unique challenges and opportunities of regional diversity in supporting the development of regional markets, risk management tools for agricultural entrepreneurs, university research and extension and the critical link between agriculture, public health and rural development in the United States and internationally.

### **2. Link Food and Farming to Health, Nutrition and Poverty Reduction**

Federal policy through the Farm Bill and other related legislation should systematically strengthen access to fresh, healthy food for all citizens, particularly the most at-risk populations. Public health principles including managing vulnerability through sound nutrition and poverty reduction must be fully integrated into farm, food and development policies.

### **3. Support Research for Sustainable Approaches to Biofuels**

Federal energy and agriculture policy on biofuels must reflect the best scientific assessments across the full life cycle of fuels including land use and carbon sinks, regional feedstocks, and organics recycling that conserve ecosystem integrity, strengthen

agricultural enterprises and support rural and community development and energy independence.

#### **4. Support Responsive Land Grant Universities**

The land grant system of universities and the cooperative extension service have unique and critical roles to play in building sustainable food systems and communities. Teaching, research and extension that is responsive to regional ecology, economics and culture must be supported in a variety of ways including the Higher Education Sustainability Act.

#### **5. Support Sustainability Science**

Federal policy should act on the conclusions of the National Research Council and the National Academy of Sciences that scientific research be directly linked to public policies and private actions through the development of sustainability science. Sustainability science is action oriented and responsive to the challenges and opportunities of meeting growing human needs while sustaining the integrity of the planet's life support systems